Journalist Sues Over Alleged NSA Probe

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Author and former New York Times associate editor Harrison E. Salisbury yesterday filed a $10,000 damage suit in U.S District Court here against the National Security Agency, contending that it illegally intercepted and kept records on his private communications while he was a foreign correspondent.

Salisbury said in court papers he discovered the interceptions after he made a Freedom of Information Act request for all CIA files and documents under his name.

The CIA referred Salisbury's request to the NSA after it located records on Salisbury that were initiated by the security agency. The NSA subsequently denied Salisbury's request for the records, which they said were classified, according to court documents.

The suit was filed for Salisbury by the American Civil Liberties Union's Center for National Security Studies.

ACLU lawyer Mark Lynch said yesterday that Salisbury's name may have been on an NSA "watch list" compiled in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Congressional investigations have disclosed that "watch-list" targets included members of the anti-war movement, and that communications from journalists in Southeast Asia were intercepted.

Lynch said Salisbury was in China and North Vietnam in 1966 and 1967, and in North Korea in 1972.

The NSA said in letters filed with the court yesterday that any records on Salisbury were developed during its lawful acquisition of foreign intelligence, and did not result from an investigation of Salisbury or The Times.

The agency said the information Salisbury requested is classified and disclosure would reveal intelligence sources and methods.

Salisbury's suit said all of his international news coverage, newspaper management and personal matters, and that the interceptions violated his constitutional rights to privacy.

The suit asks the court to declare the interceptions illegal and to permit Salisbury access to the records he has requested.